

**Decision Memo
Tongass National Forest
Yakutat Ranger District**

**Timber Stand Improvement
2019**

Decision

It is my decision to authorize pre-commercial thinning (PCT) on approximately 2284 acres of overstocked young-growth forest to enhance timber and wildlife habitat values. Implementation of this project in Timber Production, Managed Landscape, and Scenic Viewshed land use designation (LUD) will reduce the number of trees per acre to improve diameter growth, vigor, and stability of residual trees. The thinning is also designed to promote greater structural diversity and to contribute to the maintenance of understory vegetation within the stands, thereby moving the stands through the stem exclusion phase of forest succession more quickly and accelerating the development of old growth characteristics. Thinning the six acres of Old-Growth habitat is designed to accelerate future development of old growth stand characteristics.

The specific locations for the thinning activities included in this decision are shown in Table 1 and the accompanying maps. This project will be implemented as funds are available. Per the Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the agencies will reach concurrence on any temporary class 1 and 2 stream crossings if needed for OHV access prior to contract implementation.

A Heritage Review for the Yakutat project areas has been completed. No direct, indirect or cumulative effects on cultural resources are anticipated.

Biologists were consulted and no sensitive plants and/or animals are in the project area. No sensitive species will experience impacts that would cause or contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or the species.

A Subsistence Use Analysis for the Yakutat project areas was completed. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects are anticipated on subsistence uses. Though this project could benefit tree growth, understory plant growth, and wildlife habitat.

Evaluations of karst and cave resources and of recreational opportunities within the project areas were conducted and determined that no significant impacts to these resources will result from this project.

No extraordinary circumstances exist which would result in additional impacts. No irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources is anticipated. Though this project could benefit tree growth, understory plant growth, and wildlife habitat.

Management Direction

Timber Production (TM) - Manage the area to maintain and promote industrial wood production on the long-term basis. Roads are permitted under this land use designation but no new roads will be constructed. Manage to ensure that recreation opportunities are available and a variety of wildlife habitats are present.

Modified Landscape (ML) - Manage for a variety of uses. Management activities are subordinate to scenic quality as seen in the near distance. In the middle to background distance, activities may dominate but are designed to be compatible with features found in the characteristics landscape. Timber management and roads are permitted.

Scenic Viewshed (SV) - Management activities are not visually apparent to the casual observer in the near distance from visual priority travel routes and use areas. In the middle to background distance, activities are subordinate to the landscape character of the area. Timber management is allowed and roads are permitted.

Old-Growth Habitat (OG) – Management emphasis is to maintain areas of old growth forests and their associated natural ecological processes to provide habitat for old-growth associated resources. Silvicultural treatments such as thinning and pruning are permitted.

Table 1: Stands Selected for Thinning on the Yakutat Ranger District

AREA	FACTS ID	ACRES	HARVEST YEAR	LUD	Prescription
West Fork	3620000003	6	1986	ML	See Prescriptions
	3620000008	3	1991	ML/OG	
	3620000013	78	1991	ML	
	3620001013	84	1991	ML	
	3620002013	585	1985	ML	
	3630000002	11	1986	ML	
	3630000003	6	1986	ML	
	3630000005	13	1985	ML	
	3630000006	39	1985	ML	
	3630000007	11	1985	ML	
	3630000008	5	1991	ML/OG	
	3630002013	236	1991	ML/OG	
	3670000003	13	1985	ML	
	3670000004	11	1985	ML	
	3670000005	1	1985	ML	
	3670000006	18	1985	ML	
	3670000007	28	1985	ML	
	3670000008	13	1985	ML	
	3670000113	4	1985	ML	

	3670001006	1	1985	ML	
	subtotal	1166	----	----	
East Gate	3640000001	271	1985	TM	See Prescriptions
	3640000002	23	1985	TM	
	3640000003	43	1985	TM	
	3640000004	4	1985	TM	
	3640000005	13	1985	TM	
	3640000006	44	1985	TM	
	3640000007	11	1985	TM	
	3640000009	98	1985	TM	
	3640000010	26	1985	TM	
	3640000011	9	1985	TM	
	3640000012	63	1985	TM	
	3640000015	8	1986	TM	
	3640000016	11	1986	TM	
	3640000024	2	1985	TM	
	3640000025	3	1985	TM	
	3640000026	12	1985	TM	
	3640000029	2	1988	SV	
	3640000128	3	1986	TM	
	3640000129	3	1986	TM	
	3640000131	4	1985	TM	
	subtotal	653	----	----	
AREA	FACTS ID	ACRES	HARVEST YEAR	LUD	
19 Mile	3650000011	30	1987	TM	See Prescriptions
	3650000012	3	1987	TM	
	3650000029	24	1988	TM	
	3650000032	5	1988	TM	
	3650000033	13	1987	TM	
	3730000001	7	1989	TM	
	3730000002	4	1989	TM/SV	
	3730000003	1	1989	TM	
	3730000004	33	1989	TM/SV	
	3730000005	4	1989	SV	
	3730000006	5	1989	TM/SV	
	3730000007	2	1989	SV	
	3730000008	12	1989	SV	
	3730000009	18	1989	TM	
	3730000010	24	1987	TM	

	3730000011	48	1987	TM	
	3730000013	17	1987	TM	
	3730000014	9	1989	SV	
	3730000024	20	1988	TM	
	3730000025	16	1988	TM	
	3730000026	51	1988	TM	
	3730000027	4	1988	TM	
	3730000029	4	1988	TM	
	3730000030	3	1988	TM	
	3730000034	12	1988	TM	
	3730000035	18	1988	TM	
	3730000036	11	1988	TM	
	3730000037	7	1988	TM	
	3730000400	4	1989	SV	
	3730002145	56	1988	TM	
	subtotal	465	----	----	

Design Criteria

The following design criteria are incorporated into this decision to help manage fisheries, watershed, soil, and wildlife resources, and to address concerns about invasive plant species.

- Specify in thinning contract that cut trees shall be felled away from roads, ditches, road banks, sinkholes, established game and recreation trails, ponds, and streams. Any trees falling in such areas shall be removed and pulled back into the cutting area. Thinning will not restrict access to trailheads. When thinning around trailheads leave as many berry plants as possible.
- Camping permits for contractors performing thinning activities will not be approved for areas known to have significant bear activity.
- Where possible, camping permits for contractors performing thinning activities will not be approved for sites with invasive weed populations.
- OHV access will be reviewed by District Fish and Wildlife specialists and approved by the District Ranger prior to any use. Access following implementation will be consistent with the Yakutat Access Travel Management Plan decision.
- Access of stored roads shall be temporary and restricted to administrative use and use by the contractor for the purpose of completing specified work. OHV access will be reviewed by District fish and wildlife specialists and approved by the district ranger prior to any use. Access following implementation will be consistent with the Yakutat Access Travel Management plan decision.

- There are currently no Goshawk nests in the project area. The contractor shall notify the Forest Service promptly should a goshawk nest be found in the work area, at which time a trained biologist will evaluate the site and implement appropriate actions.
- There are currently no known eagle, raptor or heron nests in the project area. The contractor shall notify the Forest Service promptly should an eagle, other raptor or heron nest be found in the work area, at which time a trained biologist will evaluate the site and implement appropriate actions.
- Class I and II streams will have a 20 foot no cut buffer. Trees will be felled away from and slash will be pulled out of the buffer.
- All refueling will be accomplished at least 100 feet from all waterbodies.

Public Involvement

The public has been invited to participate in the Yakutat Ranger District Timber Stand Improvement project. A scoping letter seeking comment on the project was mailed on September 06, 2016 to approximately 443 individuals, permittees, organizations, tribes and tribal corporations, and city and state government officials who have expressed an interest in or may be affected by the proposal.

A written response was received from the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Division of Habitat and Trout Unlimited.

The response reiterates the requirement of Forest Service to obtain the necessary concurrences for any in-stream activities in fish-bearing water bodies per the Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service and ADF&G. As it relates to this project, the agencies will reach concurrence using the collaborative process prior to any temporary class 1 and 2 stream crossings for OHV access to project areas. This process will involve a trained fisheries biologist and will occur before and during contract preparation.

Rationale for Categorically Excluding This Proposal

This activity falls within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service that normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment. This category of actions is identified in the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2, Category 6, as "timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of pesticide or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction."

The Yakutat Ranger District has been pre-commercially thinning young-growth stands on a routine basis to enhance timber production, wildlife habitat and other forest resources. Pre-commercial thinning has evolved over the past 29 years to incorporate new knowledge based on formal and informal monitoring and has been proven to be beneficial for maintaining tree growth and productivity, for enhancing stand structure, and for increasing future young-growth management options for wildlife, fisheries and subsistence resources.

No extraordinary circumstances exist that would result in additional impacts. No irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources are anticipated.

Monitoring

The Tongass-Wide Young Growth Study (TWYGS) initiated in 2003 comprises approximately 40 young-growth stands across the Tongass including paired control sites that will be monitored over the next twenty years. The thinning authorized by this decision is part our programmatic thinning plan and will be monitored over time on a less formal basis.

Findings Required by Other Laws

2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan

This decision is consistent with the 2016 Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) and the Forest-wide goals and objectives for timber, fish, and wildlife listed in the TLMP.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

An ANILCA Section 810 subsistence evaluation was conducted. No significant restrictions on the abundance and distribution of, access to, or competition for subsistence resources in the project area are anticipated.

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended

The Coastal Zone Management Act requires the Forest Service, when conducting or authorizing activities or undertaking development directly affecting the coastal zone, to insure that the activities or development be consistent with the approved Alaska Coastal Management program to the maximum extent practicable. I have determined that the proposed activities are consistent with the Alaska Coastal Management Program to the maximum extent practicable.

Endangered Species Act of 1973

A biological evaluation has been completed for this action, which indicates no federally listed threatened or endangered species will be affected by this activity.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) includes locating, inventorying and evaluating the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of historic and archeological sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. Regulations (36 CFR 800) implementing Section 106 of the NHPA require Federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on sites that are determined eligible for inclusion in or are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (termed "historic properties").

A Forest Service archeologist has reviewed this project and we have made a determination of "No Historic Properties Affected" in the area of potential effects for the proposed project.

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)

This activity will not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990.

Recreational Fisheries (E.O. 12962)

Federal agencies are required, to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, and in cooperation with States and Tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities. As required by this Order, I have evaluated the effects of this action on aquatic systems and recreational fisheries and documented those effects relative to the purpose of this order. Since there are no effects to fisheries resources within the project area there will be no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts related to this Order.

Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)

We have determined that, in accordance with Executive Order 12898, this project does not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

The proposed action would have no detectable effects (positive or negative) on the managed fish species because Forest Plan direction and applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be applied during implementation of thinning activities or connected actions such as access to the area and the scale of the project area is small compared to EFH as a whole. Forest Plan direction and BMPs were developed through interagency negotiation and provide state-of-the-art protection of fish habitat.

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision, which is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR part 215, may occur immediately upon signature by the Deciding Official.

Deciding Official

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lee Benson", written over a horizontal line.

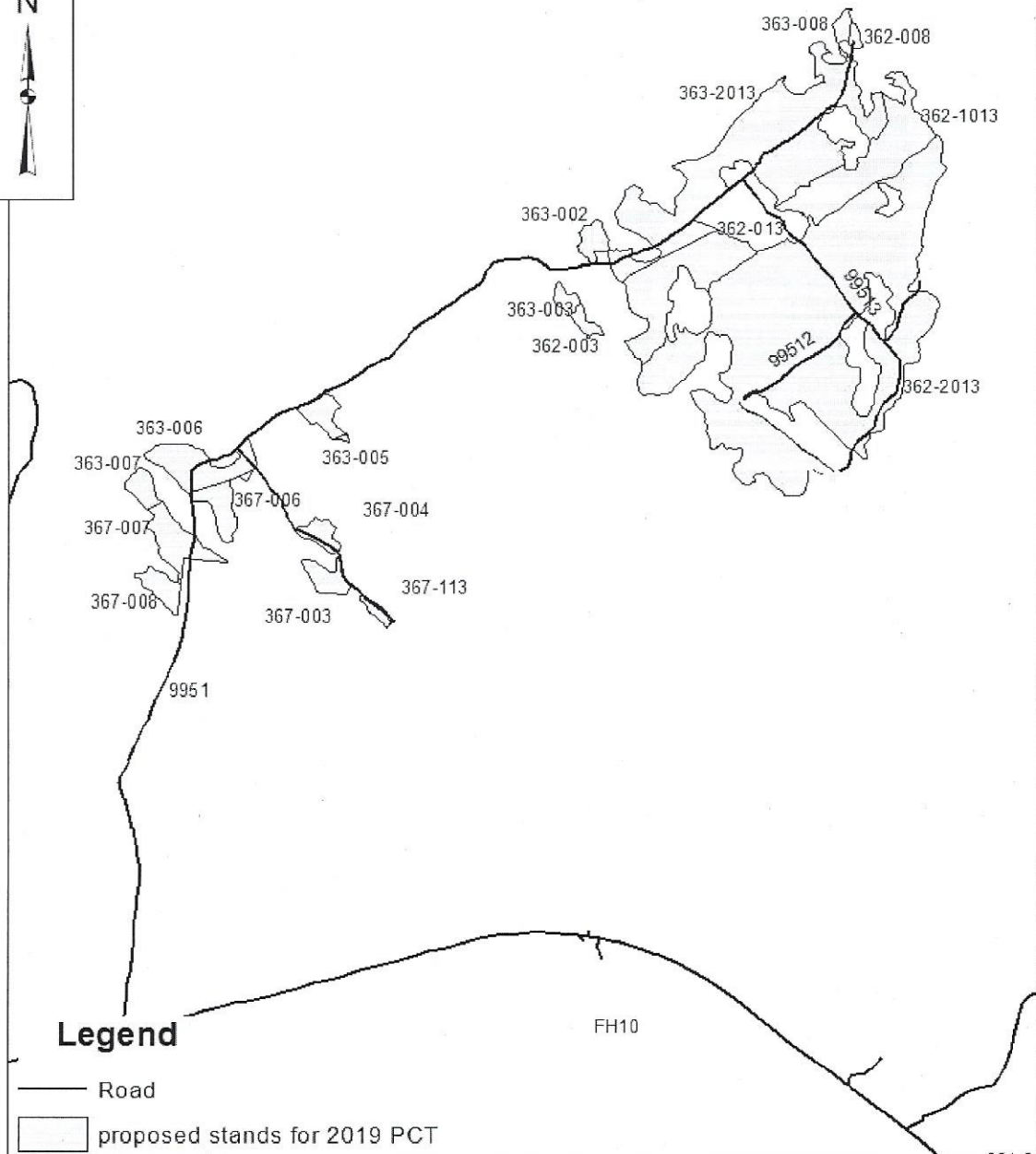
LEE BENSON

Yakutat District Ranger

A handwritten date "19 March 2019" in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

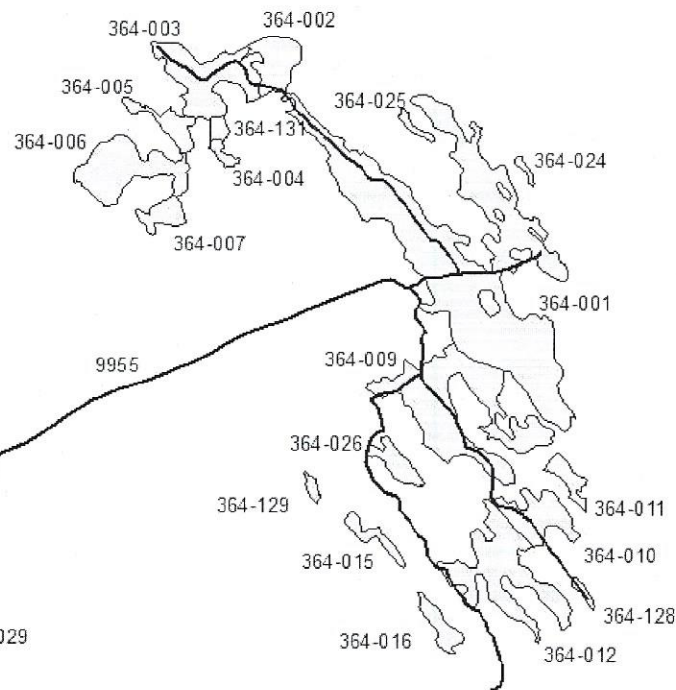
Date

FY 2019 Proposed Pre-Commercial Thinning
Yakutat Ranger District
Tongass national Forest



0 0.325 0.65 1.3 1.95 2.6 Miles

FY 2019 Proposed Pre-Commercial Thinning
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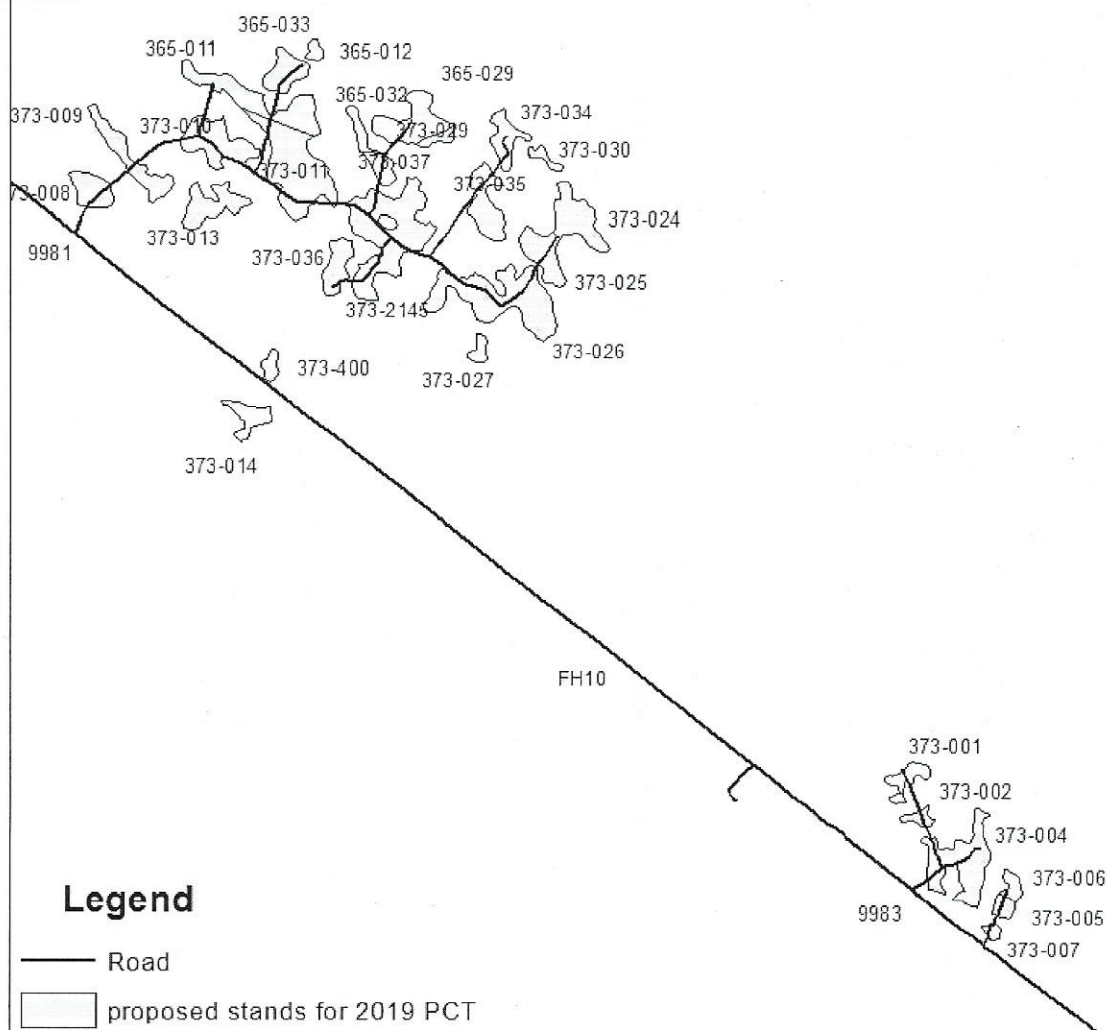
Legend

— Road

□ proposed stands for 2019 PCT

0 0.325 0.65 1.3 1.95 2.6 Miles

FY 2019 Proposed Pre-Commercial Thinning
Yakutat Ranger District
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0 0.325 0.65 1.3 1.95 2.6 Miles